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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iran

Key stories in the media:

On Sunday, Yediot reported that James Wolfensohn, the special Quartet envoy, has decided to discontinue his service after 11 months, and not to extend his term, which is due to expire at the end of April.

All media reported that on Sunday, Shas and Kadima signed a coalition agreement, after Interim PM Ehud Olmert decided to let Shas join the coalition without agreeing to the evacuation of settlements, even though this is one of the government guidelines. Major media reported that Olmert told Shas Chairman Eli Yishai that Shas would be allowed to decide on the evacuation if and when the issue becomes an item on the government's agenda. The caveat was included in a letter attached to the coalition agreement. Yishai was quoted as saying that the letter commits his party to the government guidelines "in the framework of Olmert's victory speech only," which did not mention his "convergence plan" or the evacuation of settlements. Yediot wrote that Shas's entry into the coalition would cost the state 2 billion shekels (around USD 440 million). Maariv reported that Olmert officially told Israeli President Moshe Katsav Sunday that this morning, he intends to present the coalition agreements to the Knesset. This morning, Israel Radio was covering the process Olmert's awarding of portfolios to senior Kadima leaders. Major media reported that on Sunday, by a slim majority, the Labor Party's Central Committee authorized party chairman to pick the ministers for the incoming coalition government. The media reported that after the secret ballot, Peretz presented his list of ministers: Knesset Members Yuli Tamir, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, Shalom Simhon.

Over the weekend, the media quoted Olmert as saying in an interview with the German newspaper Bild that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a "psychopath, and 'Hitler'." Olmert fell short of calling for a military strike on Iran, but did say: "The West under the leadership of the United States is going to have to make sure that Iran does not, under any circumstances, acquire non-conventional weapons." On Sunday, Yediot wrote that the newly launched Israeli satellite Eros B began sending high-quality images to the ground station in Israel of various sites around the world, including the nuclear installations in Iran. On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that the US and Britain are behind the move to get the UN Security Council more actively involved in the possibility of imposing future sanctions on Iran if Ahmadinejad's administration does not comply with the demand to stop his country's nuclear program. The Jerusalem Post quoted President Bush as saying: "I think that the

diplomatic options are just the beginning." On Sunday, Yevgeni Primakov, former Russian PM and FM, was quoted as saying over the weekend in an interview with The Jerusalem Post: "Russia will do its utmost to prevent the further escalation of tension in the Iranian nuclear crisis."

On Sunday, Yediot reported that the Hamas leadership is contemplating endorsing the Saudi initiative as a way of breaking the ring of international isolation that came to circumscribe the PA after Ismail Haniyeh formed his government. On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that French President Jacques Chirac suggested over the weekend that the World Bank funnel assistance, including the salaries of PA employees, directly to Palestinians to stave off a humanitarian crisis. The Jerusalem Post noted that Chirac's proposal could put him in conflict with Israeli and US positions. Today, The Jerusalem Post reported that the PA is on the verge of bankruptcy and civil war. On Sunday, Hatzofe also reported on a worsening of the economic crisis in the PA. Yediot reported that the Foreign Ministry has ordered all Israeli representations not to hold talks with Palestinian diplomatic representatives. Yediot said that this means a return to the era preceding the Oslo Agreement.

Major media reported that on Sunday, the cabinet unanimously approved recommendations to change the route of the separation fence around Ariel, Gush Etzion, and the Hebron Hills. The Jerusalem Post wrote that the changes would leave 40,000 Palestinians outside the fence.

Major media reported that the Shin Bet revealed on Sunday that senior Hamas figures in the Gaza Strip funded and trained the terrorists who last week launched an abortive strike at the Gaza Strip's Karni crossing. The Jerusalem Post wrote that this was the first time since winning the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January that Hamas has been revealed as being directly involved in anti-Israeli activity. On Sunday, The Jerusalem Post led with the concern expressed by PA officials over the weekend about reports that Al Qaida was planning to assassinate top PA leaders.

Israel Radio and other media reported that a female resident of Tulkarm was killed this morning by IDF soldiers during a search for a wanted Islamic Jihad militant.

Ha'aretz reported that the IDF and police have given settlers 10 days to leave a house in Hebron, in the latest chapter of an ongoing dispute. The newspaper also reported that settlers from nearby Havat Maon (Maon Farm) allegedly attacked Palestinian children.

On Sunday, Maariv reported that the Organization for the Support of the Palestinian People's Resistance would be holding a conference that day with the participation of representatives of Palestinian terror organizations at noon in a Paris suburb.

On Sunday, Yediot reported that the State Department is establishing a department for Arab media, which will be shaped along the lines of the Israeli Foreign Ministry's model.

Yediot reported that it currently takes 57 days for Israelis to get tourist visas to the US.

On Sunday, Ha'aretz reported that new revelations about the circumstances under which Israel and the US reached a secret understanding on the Israeli nuclear program, and the Richard Nixon administration came to recognize Israel's policy of "nuclear ambiguity," appear in an article published this weekend in Washington. The article, in the current issue of Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, was coauthored by Israeli historian Avner Cohen, who wrote "Israel and the Bomb" (1998), and William Burr, an expert on US nuclear weapons policy.

Maariv and Israel Radio reported that on Sunday, Egyptian authorities arrested 10 Israelis who were participating in a maritime rally. The media cited Egypt's claim that they do not appear on the list of rally participants and that the Israeli Foreign Ministry is working to resolve the crisis.

Maariv reported that Olmert is on TIME Magazine's current list of 100 most influential people.

All media extensively reported on events related to Israel's Memorial Day, which will be observed tonight and tomorrow. Major media cited the Defense Ministry

as saying that 138 soldiers have been killed since last Memorial Day. The ministry also said that since 1860, when the first Jewish settlers began establishing Jewish neighborhoods outside the Jerusalem city walls, 22,123 soldiers have been killed. Ha'aretz reported that the National Insurance Institute issued statistics according to which 794 civilians, including 42 foreign workers and tourists, have been killed and 7,748 have been wounded in 945 terrorist attacks since the beginning of the Intifada in October 2000.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Whoever the next US president is, the overall impression ... is that the government of Israel is deluding itself if it believes that 'convergence' into 'settlement blocs,' as opposed to a nearly total withdrawal from the Green Line, will satisfy the next administration."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "The importance of the guidelines takes second place to Ehud Olmert's repeated declarations, which have become a pledge to the public to work toward withdrawal from the territories" The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "We already knew there was little likelihood of Hamas changing its ways. Now we know it is not very good at even appearing to moderate."

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz: "If Hamas is pushed into a corner ... the assertion that Hamas is tied to Al Qaida would become a self-fulfilling prophecy."

Walid M. Awad, Director General of External Relations at the Office of the Chairman [President] of the Palestinian Authority, wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "Abbas made his choice and opted for a negotiated, just peace with Israel. It is now Israel's turn, either to reciprocate ... or [to opt] for more long years of conflict."

Block Quotes:

I. "After Bush, the Green Line"

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (5/1): "As long as [Senator John McCain] is not a declared [presidential] candidate, his comments to Ha'aretz on Saturday, during a weekend break from American politics here in Brussels, reflect the personal opinion of a senior and influential figure in the area of defense policy in the United States Senate, rather than an attempt to formulate policy guidelines for his administration.... Whoever the next US president is, the overall impression from a conversation with a leading candidate like McCain is that the government of Israel is deluding itself if it believes that 'convergence' into 'settlement blocs,' as opposed to a nearly total withdrawal from the Green Line, will satisfy the next administration. In 2009, it will be a different show: Neither Bush nor settlement blocs."

II. "Reduction in Settlement Areas"

Ha'aretz editorialized (4/30): "Because of clear prior agreements regarding diplomatic issues, it is difficult to understand why the ambiguous formulation, 'reduction in areas of Israeli settlement in the territories of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank],' was chosen instead of the more precise 'withdrawal and evacuation'.... This is the first time in almost forty years of occupation that an Israeli government has declared it is 'striving' for such a reduction not because there is no choice, but because Israeli interests require it.... The importance of the guidelines takes second place to Ehud Olmert's repeated declarations, which have become a pledge to the public to work toward withdrawal from the territories -- either by agreement or unilaterally -- in this term of office."

III. "Hamas Can't Even Fake Moderation"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist

Barry Rubin, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (5/1): " Hamas can pretend to be a non-terrorist group observing a cease-fire while financing and helping both the [Popular Resistance] Committees and Islamic Jihad to carry out terrorist attacks. It would be nice to say no one would be stupid enough to fall for this type of transparent trick. There are still plenty of Western politicians and intellectuals who belie that hope, but far less -- and certainly far fewer national leaders -- than there might be had Hamas taken lessons from Yasser Arafat on the cultivation of useful idiots. We already knew there was little likelihood of Hamas changing its ways. Now we know it is not very good at even appearing to moderate."

IV. "Al Qaida? If Hamas Is Pushed Into a Corner"

Arab affairs commentator Danny Rubinstein wrote in Ha'aretz (5/1): "Is there a danger that Hamas and Al Qaida could be linked? Warnings to such an effect could be heard last week, after the release of an Osama bin Laden tape expressing support for Hamas, which, he said, was defending itself against the 'Zionist-Crusader offensive.' Even C. David Welch, the Assistant US Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, discussed such a danger. Hamas is very angry at these reports, and views them as attempts to muddy the organization's name, as part of the repeated efforts to topple the democratically elected government of Ismail Haniyeh.... But if Hamas is pushed into a corner and the distress and anarchy in the West Bank and Gaza intensify, a comfortable backdrop for Al Qaida activity in Palestine could develop -- and then, the assertion that Hamas is tied to Al Qaida would become a self-fulfilling prophecy."

IV. "Israel Does Have a Partner For Peace"

Walid M. Awad, Director General of External Relations at the Office of the Chairman [President] of the Palestinian Authority, wrote in The Jerusalem Post (5/1): " Hamas, considered by the US and the West as a terrorist organization, is helping Israel achieve its other objective, the complete devastation of the Palestinian economy and reducing the Palestinian public into a state of poverty and helplessness.... Chaos and civil disorder may engulf the Palestinian territory and perhaps beyond. This is not in the interest of anyone, including Israel.... Let us consider the alternative [to the boycott of the PA by Israel and the international community]: negotiating with Abbas, in his capacity as president of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and the elected president of the Palestinian Authority. Abbas is ready to immediately resume negotiations with the Israeli government, bearing in mind that negotiating with Israel is still the mandate of the PLO, which signed all previous agreements with Israel.... Abbas made his choice and opted for a negotiated, just peace with Israel. It is now Israel's turn, either to reciprocate by extending its hand to the president and the Palestinian people, showing respect, acknowledging Palestinian rights, and raising hopes for peace, or by opting for more long years of conflict. "

I2. Iran:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "At a time when the international community is being recruited for a goal that is important to Israel, there is no reason to spur Israeli-Iranian wrangling."

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Engaging in a vociferous fight with Ahmadinejad is precisely what the president of Iran wants."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "It is the US, not Europe, that is now taking the international system seriously and acting in that system's best interest -- including when the US threatens to form a 'coalition of the willing.'"

Block Quotes:

II. "A Race Against Time"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (5/1): "Israel has a supreme interest in stopping the threat of nuclear weapons in the hands of a country whose

president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, preaches the destruction of Israel and the evacuation of its Jewish residents. Interim Prime Minister Ehud Olmert addressed the matter in an interview with the German newspaper, Bild, in which he called Ahmadinejad a 'psychopath' and compared him to Adolf Hitler. Olmert, who will meet with Bush in three weeks, is hanging his hopes on a West, 'led by the United States,' that, as he said in the interview, 'will not under any circumstances allow Iran to have nuclear weapons'.... At a time when the international community is being recruited for a goal that is important to Israel, there is no reason to spur Israeli-Iranian wrangling. This is liable only to give European and other governments an excuse to pull out, or could also lead to demands that Israel, too, pay a price by diluting its deterrence capabilities in exchange for Iranian disarmament."

II. "Not Every Jew-Hater Is Hitler"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (4/30): "It was neither correct nor wise to compare the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to Adolf Hitler. It was particularly inappropriate to do so in an interview to a German newspaper, which is what acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert did.... Those comments serve nothing and promote nothing. They only attest to mounting nervousness in Israel. Calumny and psychiatric diagnoses are no substitute for firm policy; engaging in a vociferous fight with Ahmadinejad is precisely what the president of Iran wants. The Iranian test is going to be the most difficult and complicated test in the term of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and we need to prepare for it diligently. The second Khomeinist revolution that has been under way in Tehran for approximately a year has cast its terror on the West, the Middle East and us.... Jew-hatred, fierce and diseased as it may be, is not enough to make someone into a 'Hitler,' who had a fully cogent Nazi world view: secular, racist, murderous and controlling. Ahmadinejad is enclosed in his fanatical, apocalyptic and sacrificing religious faith. Hitler wanted to create a new German superhuman; Ahmadinejad believes in the imminent appearance of the Shiite messiah, and has already begun to hear voices. Ahmadinejad is prepared to drown the Middle East in the blood of an all out war of Armageddon because only as a result of it and in its wake will the Shiite redemption come. That is the timetable of his faith. Ahmadinejad's lunacy is not a new form of either Nazism or Hitlerism. It is something else. In order to stop it and even to do away with it one needs to understand its world, faith, symbols and weaknesses. Childishly calling him names does not promote any operative goal; it only gets in the way because it lays bare the blurring and confusion in the Prime Minister's Bureau in Jerusalem."

III. "Make the System Work"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (5/1): "Europe is acting as if preventing the US from acting 'on its own' is even more important than blocking an Iranian nuke. But Europe, by the lights of its own belief in multilateralism, should have another, no less important objective: proving that the UN system can force a blatant aggressor to back down and thereby remove a dire threat to the international community. It is the US, not Europe, that is now taking the international system seriously and acting in that system's best interest -- including when the US threatens to form a 'coalition of the willing.' Europe should join the US in confronting China and Russia with this stance, which would force those countries to go along or risk shifting the action away from where they enjoy veto power. The best way to bolster the international system is to make it work."

JONES